

VZCZCXYZ0016
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSK #1495/01 3471358
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 131358Z DEC 05
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3457
INFO RUEHVL/AMEMBASSY VILNIUS 3448
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3230
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA 1475
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 3106
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KIEV 3025
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0785
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 001495

SIPDIS

KIEV FOR USAID

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/15

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: EUR DAS Kramer Discusses Campaign Strategy with
Opposition

Ref: A) Minsk 1410 B) Minsk 1406 C) Minsk 1437

Classified by Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: On December 6, EUR DAS David Kramer met with single opposition candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's campaign team. Milinkevich was out in the regions on his campaign trips. Campaign manager Sergey Kalyakin and his deputies described the negative effects the government-supported information blockade has had on their election campaign, but expressed encouragement with the level of voter interest in Milinkevich's candidacy. The team dismissed rumors of early presidential elections but stressed their campaign activities were limited due to financial constraints. The team recounted Milinkevich's recent meetings in Moscow, Vilnius, and Kiev, and described plans to boost the single candidate's ratings. Kramer assured the team members that the U.S. will continue to push for a free and fair electoral process, and will remain committed to democracy promotion in the long term. End Summary.

12. (C) On December 6, EUR DAS David Kramer, accompanied by Ambassador and Embassy note takers, met with the senior leadership of single opposition candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's campaign team, including campaign manager Sergey Kalyakin, deputy campaign managers Vintsuk Vyachorka and Victor Korneyenko, and business manager Valery Ukhnyalov. At the time of the meeting, Milinkevich was in the eastern part of the country on a campaign trip.

Combating the Information Blockade

13. (C) Kalyakin explained that in order for Milinkevich to have a fighting chance heading into the official presidential campaign period, approximately 60 percent of voters must at least be aware of his candidacy and 30-35 percent of the electorate must be willing to vote for him. However, Kalyakin reported that the most serious obstacle to reaching this goal is the campaign team's lack of access to mass media. In an effort to mitigate this problem, Kalyakin said Milinkevich must rely on direct contact with voters and advertising through independent media.

14. (C) Kalyakin said that the team is working to increase the number of volunteers from from 3,000 to 10,000 over the

next few months. Kalyakin noted that these foot soldiers will be responsible for the door-to-door voter outreach campaign and the collection of signatures in support of Milinkevich's candidacy. The team has also launched a website (www.milinkevich.org) and distributed one million leaflets and 100,000 bulletins on Milinkevich's platform, the Democratic Congress, and the electoral process. The team possesses a few low-scale printing machines but the level and speed of output is much smaller and slower. The team mainly has relied on publishing houses within Belarus to print their information, but Kalyakin suspected that they would not be able to continue printing in Belarus for much longer. The publishers fear persecution and risk fines and most likely will begin to refuse future printing projects. Kalyakin expects that the team will have to print in Ukraine.

15. (C) Kalyakin added that the campaign team regularly utilizes independent newspapers and websites to promote Milinkevich. Some independent newspapers have provided Milinkevich the opportunity to engage directly with voters. Belarusians are asked to write or phone in questions to the paper for Milinkevich and he will respond. Kalyakin stated, however, that starting in January there will really only be two remaining independent newspapers left for him to use (Belarus i Rynok and Belaruskaya Gazeta) and these newspapers focused more on economics than politics. [Note: The state-controlled printing and distribution monopolies refused to renew their contracts with several national and regional independent newspapers. See ref A and ref B for details.]

Milinkevich's Travel Within the Country

16. (C) Kalyakin provided DAS Kramer his assessment of Milinkevich's domestic campaign trips. The single candidate conducted five one-day trips to different regions in the country to experiment with various campaign techniques. Based on the results of the short trips, Kalyakin said that many voters are afraid to be seen interacting with Milinkevich, but those voters who do have the courage have expressed interest in his candidacy. Milinkevich has already launched a series of longer domestic trips lasting seven to eight days, and from December 5-12 he will visit more than 20 cities in the country. Kalyakin noted that the local authorities have not interfered too much during the campaign stops, but Milinkevich remains under constant surveillance, regardless of his whereabouts. Kalyakin cited as an example the tendency for university administrators to approach and observe (and sometimes publicly chastise) students who are talking to Milinkevich in an effort to intimidate them.

17. (C) Kalyakin said he recognized that the campaign trips alone will not boost Milinkevich's popular support ratings to 30-35 percent. He stressed, however, that given the information blockade on the opposition, the campaign trips combined with the planned door-to-door campaign are the team's most effective tools for winning support from voters.

Milinkevich Also Keeps a Busy International Travel Schedule

18. (C) Kalyakin and the deputy campaign manager responsible for the campaign's relations with foreign countries Vintsuk Vyachorka said Milinkevich has made several trips to neighboring countries to drum up moral and possibly financial support for his candidacy. They reported on Milinkevich's recent trips to Moscow, Vilnius, and Kiev.

Milinkevich in Russia

¶9. (C) Kalyakin said on November 10 Milinkevich traveled on a "probing visit" to Russia to meet with a member of the Duma, business leaders, and the Belarusian diaspora. As part of the conditions for the meetings posed by the Russians, the meetings were closed and not publicized until afterwards. Kalyakin stated that Putin sanctioned these meetings and that Putin most likely received a formal report on the meetings. Kalyakin suspected that they were not that far from actually meeting the Russian president himself. (Post: Barring unforeseen changes in the relationship between Minsk and Moscow, Post doubts Putin would entertain a meeting with Milinkevich.)

¶10. (C) Kramer inquired about the extent to which Milinkevich's Russian interlocutors were willing to provide financial support to his campaign. Kalyakin said that it is not a problem to find money in Russia; the problem is obtaining permission from the Russian authorities for Russian business leaders to give money to opposition groups. Kalyakin pointed to the predicament of Russian business magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky as an example. Thus far, the Kremlin has not authorized Russian government officials or business leaders to provide material assistance to Milinkevich.

¶11. (C) Kalyakin believes the Russians have not made up their minds about Belarus. Kalyakin viewed this observation as a positive sign and felt that if Milinkevich could significantly increase his popularity ratings, Russian officials and business leaders would support him. Kramer suggested that based on his meetings in Russia, there seemed to be a lot of interest in Milinkevich's candidacy from Russian government officials, political analysts and local business leaders. He added this interest appeared to be sanctioned by the Kremlin. He cited a critical report about the human rights situation in Belarus that was released while Lukashenko was visiting

Russia as further evidence.

Milinkevich in Lithuania and Ukraine

¶12. (C) Kalyakin and Vyachorka said that Milinkevich's November 25 meetings in Vilnius were productive. Milinkevich met with Lithuanian President Adamkus and spoke before the Lithuanian parliament. Vyachorka noted the Lithuanian president expressed his deep interest in Belarus, which stems from the shared history between the two countries, and discussed with Milinkevich possible ways international organizations could help democratic forces in Belarus.

¶13. (C) Vyachorka said Milinkevich and he traveled to Kiev On November 30 to participate in the Community of Democracies' conference. He also had the opportunity to meet briefly with Undersecretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky and several Western ambassadors. Vyachorka told Kramer it was vital to establish and maintain contacts in Kiev since it is a neighboring country with a good economy and an interest in the political situation in Belarus. However, Vyachorka conceded that Kiev also remains interested in serving as an intermediary between the Lukashenko regime and the EU, which could limit the Yuschenko government's ability to provide direct and open support to Milinkevich.

No Need to Worry about Early Elections...

¶14. (C) DAS Kramer inquired about whether the campaign team would be ready if the government called the presidential elections early. [Note: the elections are currently scheduled for July, but there were rumors they could occur as early as March. End note.] Kalyakin

admitted that anything is possible in Belarus and said that such a decision by the government would be a devastating blow to the campaign. He noted, however, that the team has already begun to prepare for this possibility. Regardless, Kalyakin does not believe the elections will be held before July. Kalyakin stated that the government must give four months notice before holding elections. [Note: The Belarusian Constitution only requires 90 days advanced notice.] Kalyakin stated significant advance preparation must be done and he would have noticed if the government had begun the process of organizing the elections.

...But We Do Need to Worry About Money

¶15. (C) Deputy campaign manager Korneyenko told DAS Kramer that the team has a sound strategy and a good campaign plan but is faced with severe budgetary constraints. The team would prefer to seek financial support from the local business community, but Korneyenko pointed out that practically all business is under the government's control. Instead, the team has to rely on international aid, and to the extent possible, individual donations from Belarusian voters. Korneyenko went on to criticize the Europeans for not being able to help the opposition. He recognized the bureaucratic inefficiencies and obstacles inherent in the EU assistance program, but stated that the EU talks too much while the U.S. is the one supporting the opposition. At this point, Korneyenko thanked Kramer and Ambassador for the help the USG provides through U.S. NGOs.

U.S. Pledges Long-Term Interest in Belarus

¶16. (C) DAS Kramer stressed that the political and economic repression in Belarus is an issue of increasing importance on the U.S. agenda. Kramer said the U.S. will continue to promote democracy and a free and fair electoral process, but he expressed doubt the Lukashenko regime will permit such an outcome. He added that the GOB-proposed amendments

to the criminal code, which aim to stifle dissent (ref C), only confirm his assessment. However, Kramer noted that even if regime change occurred tomorrow, Belarus would not immediately become a democracy. Therefore, Kramer assured the team that U.S. is fully prepared to remain engaged with Belarus over the long run through the Embassy's work and our assistance programs. Despite what the current government propagandizes, Kramer assured the guests that the people of Belarus have a friend in the U.S.

Comment

¶17. (C) It was encouraging to hear that the relatively few voters who have met with Milinkevich on his domestic trips have responded positively to his campaign. However, the

campaign team does not seem to have made significant progress since the October 1-2 democratic congress. Financial constraints, lack of access to the state media and an increasingly more hostile political environment continue to cripple the campaign.

Krol